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ABSTRACT

In the English Department at Illinois State University, a number of programs are carried out which validate secondary teachers. Undergirding the departmental policies is a view of a dialogic relationship among the three discourse communities involved: student teachers, secondary teachers, and university professors. The journey of a student teacher is like a mythical, heroic journey. Student teachers are like internal seekers on a personal quest. In light of such a perspective, student teachers are asked to keep journals. The journeys of student teachers must result in empowerment, which will allow for the empowerment of others. The hero's journey is also marked by encounters with older and wiser mentors. Student teachers must also deal with fears, which are like the enemies or walls faced by the hero. Student journals often reflect such fears. Illinois State's program also focuses on attempts to create community among student teachers, other teachers, and administrators. Collaboration, conferences, and articulation programs have been initiated. A banquet is held after student teaching to celebrate the successful completion of the program. Student teachers are encouraged to conduct research during their experience. Questionnaires seeking data from cooperating teachers provide useful feedback. Positive benefits have resulted from these programs, all based on a vision of student teaching that centers on its heroic and life-enhancing aspects. (HB)

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Validating Secondary Teachers: Programs and Research at Illinois State University

Within the English Department at Illinois State University (ISU), we have a number of programs which validate secondary teachers. Some of them involve secondary teachers who serve as cooperating teachers for our student teachers. I will address some of those programs, but first I would like to offer a philosophical perspective which, I believe, undergirds and describes our view of the dialogic relationships among the three discourse communities involved: student teachers, secondary teachers, and university supervisors and professors.

To understand the self and relationships to one's world, psychologists increasingly have turned to myth and "heroes' journeys" such as those discussed in Joseph Campbell's The Power of Myth (1988), Carol Pearson's The Hero Within (1989), and Robert Bly's Iron John (1991). The hero's journey is not gender specific. It is a journey in which the hero must leave a place of security to go beyond in search of something of value to bring back for the good of all. In mythology that something is often represented by fire or by light. But whatever that something is, it is holy; it is sacred.

The journey of the student teacher is a hero's journey. In mythology and in student teaching, the quest of the hero is marked by trials and obstacles to overcome, but the hero understands the value of that which the hero is seeking and thus continues the journey despite the obstacles and hardships. But it is a journey we must all

travel to its end.

Carol Pearson describes the mythological search for the holy grail as a hero's journey in which the hero is an internal seeker. I see the student teacher as an internal seeker. The internal force within that seeker drives the seeker in the search for the holy grail. And it requires the seeker to determine what he or she values and holds sacred. It is an inner journey, beset by danger and doubt, fear and loss of faith.

During student teaching our student teachers keep journals. One student teacher, David, wrote eloquently in his journal of events that had happened to him and Barton, his friend and fellow student teacher as they completed the prologue each day of student teaching--their dreaded two-hour drive from Normal across the Illinois heartland to Pekin, Illinois. The events he described were all true. For them Route 9 became "a Godforsaken deathtrap, littered with slaughtered animals" and frought with hazzards unbelievable. On one occasion three "drunk Samaritans" in a pickup truck had to pull them out of an icy ditch. On another they were stopped and frisked by police who suspected them of being drug dealers. "We've had an eye on you. Why else" they reasoned "would two young males wearing suits be making that journey twice a day?"

Not as Joseph Campbell might have written, perhaps, but I believe that David and Campbell were talking about the same thing. David did not realize it at the time, but he was on a hero's journey as he made that daily trip to Pekin East High School. And so were others as they made their journeys to Princeton, to Olympia, to Bloomington High School and to all the other schools where they went

to teach.

But their journey, like our own journey into teaching, is far more than an outward journey to each location. It is a journey to the very center of your own existence--a journey frought with questions and trials and triumphs and fears and hurdles.

But it is during such journeys that we find out about ourselves--that we become empowered and can lift others up. And when we are empowered, we can empower our students to write better than they thought possible, to interpret literature they thought they could not understand, and to see themselves as worthwhile individuals whose views and opinions matter. When student teachers are empowered, they can give their students faith in themselves and their own abilities, just as their supervising teachers and university supervisors have empowered them.

Those who take the hero's journey, into student teaching, for example, come back changed. The return from the hero's journey is fundamentally about metamorphosis. Brian Cleeve says that it requires the willingness to die to our old selves, to give birth to the new. This means dying to one's egotism and being reborn in love for all humankind. The inner Seeker is the part of us that is willing to seek not only for ourselves but for all humanity (John Matthews, At the Table of the Grail, Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1987. 6-7).

If we at the university want to promote an authentic hero's journey for our student teachers, then we, too, must die to our egotism and our blame of secondary teachers. Our roles as university supervisors and cooperating teachers must be to validate and assist

the student teachers in a cooperative effort on their journeys to become heroes, to become confident, competent teachers who recognize their own talents and worth to society and to themselves, and who will, therefore, be able to impart light, to recognize and validate those around them, especially their students.

The hero's journey, though dangerous, is also marked along the way by wise people or wise figures such as Yoda in The Star Wars Trilogy. Because our student teachers and the secondary cooperating teaches may look to us to be the wise persons along the way, we must give up the illusion of personal insignificance But if we are truly wise, we will also recognize their wisdom and validate each discourse community they represent. If we do not, we will be viewed as condescending elitists who hide in ivory towers and fortress castles with our theories that do not work in real classrooms. In that role, we become separated by walls which seem somehow unnatural--to be the antithesis of what our goal should be. I would like to paraphrase what the German poet, Ranier Maria Rilke, says about walls and fortress castles--like the ones we at the university and college level sometimes hide in. "You who live in fortress castles/ Don't you long for the Enemy?/ He is encamped beyond your walls./ He sends in no one to barter,/ to negotiate/ or to strike a deal./ He works in silence--to break down your walls." ("All of You Undisturbed Cities." A Book for the Hours of Prayer. Selected Poems of Ranier Maria Rilke. trans. Robert Bly, ed. Robert Bly (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) 41.

Who is the enemy who works in silence to break down our walls? Is it the subconscious? The collective conscience? Or in

mythological terms, is it the "Force" which has the power both to destroy and to give life. Recall "the Force" mentioned in The Starwars Trilogy and the blessing, "May the Force be with you?"

Just prior to student teaching I asked my students to write about their greatest fears concerning student teaching. And they did. To illustrate that teachers at any level may be surrounded by walls, walls of fear, for example, here are some excerpts from what Tom wrote.

> I'm worried that my teacher won't like the way I teach. I'm worried that the students will be out of control and I won't be able to handle them. I want my students to learn and sometimes I don't know if I can always be able to make them give me their insights. I want to be a good, caring, in-control teacher but nobody has told me how to do that. I'm scared I'm going to screw up.

Despite his fears, Tom took the hero's journey into student teaching. Tom, himself, had been an outstanding student with an acute interest in promoting critical thinking in his students. And often he found himself overwhelmed by the amount of time student teaching takes. But Pearson says, "So strong is the urge that the Seeker is willing, if necessary, to sacrifice the most valued relationships and accomplishments--home, work, friends, loved ones--to the quest (131). Even so, Tom still did not feel secure. And at times his fear of being found out created walls of denial and degradation which begged to be broken down. But when they were, Tom was empowered to a new kind of responsibility. He wrote:

> One day when Mrs. Adams observed my fifth hour class, it went

> horribly, and they walked all over me. After school, she told me she was disappointed. But she was very nice about the whole thing. I could see that it hurt her too. Well, I broke down and it all seemed to fall apart right there. After I got myself under control, she asked me if I was alright. She told me to go home and think about what happened. I told no one about what had happened; only Mrs. Adams and I knew. The next day I took control. From that point on, things went uphill. I knew that I wanted to be a teacher and that I could get students to care about learning and about themselves and others.

Tom's journal illustrates Carol Pearson's point that "Whatever horrible or degrading things we do in life, the inner Seeker remains pure in its fidelity to the quest (131)." Tom's journal also illustrates that the journey is a process of making the unconscious conscious. To be conscious is to wake up, to face painful realities, and take a new kind of responsibility for being true to ourselves and constructive members of the human race. Experiencing the Self is not simply about being virtuous. It is also about tapping into the fullness of one's capacities. When secondary teachers help student teachers to do this, they validate them.

At Illinois State University we also validate secondary English teachers through collaborative programs that include cooperating teachers, other secondary English teachers, and university English professors in articulation meetings, research projects, and in-service programs to promote mutual university-secondary school aims. In addition to department support some of these programs have received funding from sources outside the university.

For example, Ron Fortune of ISU's English Department has been awarded two National Endowment for the Humanities grants which over a five-year period have funded statewide articulation programs between university and secondary English teachers. The first was a two-year writing project that required teachers from colleges to visit and observe secondary English classes and vice versa. The second was a three-year project in which high school teachers learned to use manuscripts of professional writers to teach writing in the high schools. This project culminated in the publication of a journal, Literature and Writing: a Journal of the NEH/ISU Collaborative Teaching Project created from articles these teachers submitted on "Teaching with Manuscripts." Jan Neuleib of ISU's English Department has also received grant funding for a national writing project. The project involves Illinois teachers across grade levels, including elementary, secondary and college teachers in the Bay Area Writing Project.

For other continuing education opportunities, the ISU English Department hosts an annual conference each spring for English teachers throughout the state, Heads of Illinois Secondary English Departments. Similar in program format to the Illinois Association of Teachers of English, it is open to secondary teachers and department chairs and also to university faculty and students to attend and also to present programs. It is always well attended.

And to promote articulation, prior to student teaching, we ISU English Department supervisors invite all of the secondary cooperating teachers to articulation seminars. And together we discuss issues and mutual expectations, respond to each other's

questions, and offer possible solutions to problems that may arise during student teaching. And despite some of their having to drive from distant places on rural roads in subzero Illinois winters, those who make the trip always express appreciation for the experience of having their views heard and for hearing the views of other secondary teachers and university supervisors. They feel more confident. They feel validated.

Furthermore, we enlist the expertise of the secondary teachers in our English Education program. Prior to student teaching, we also invite secondary English teachers to serve as guest speakers on panels for our methods classes. In the past, they have spoken on topics ranging from "The Writing Workshop" to "How to Survive and Flourish During Student Teaching." And after student teaching we invite a panel of administrators and English Department Chairs and a new teacher to discuss the job search with our students.

As a celebration, both cooperating teachers and student teachers are invited after student teaching has ended to the ISU English Education banquet given in their honor. This banquet has been funded by the ISU English Department and supplemented by $500 corporate grants.

As a way of encouraging student teachers to see themselves as researchers, during student teaching, we require our student teachers to conduct a research project in which they identify a problem their students have, create an assignment to addresss the problem, and write a report of the results after student teaching. Their cooperating teachers are welcomed to participate in this project.

And in addition we have sought the views of cooperating teachers

through their anonymous responses to open-ended questionnaires. Recently of twenty-eight which were issued, seventeen were returned with some giving more than one response to each question. Their responses to the two items which follow, reveal some concerns from their perspectives.

Question #7 asked, "What do you consider to be most important for a student teacher to know?" Ten responses indicated "Subject matter," three "Interpersonal skills regarding how to relate to students." The following responses were mentioned only once as "Most important. . .": "Rules of the supervising teacher and the school," "Ways to adapt content to students," and "Classroom control."

Cooperating teachers also completed Item #8, "These are my biggest fears before the student teacher arrives." Nine responses indicated variations of "For my students' learning--competence, subject matter," four "Incompatible personalities (for me and the student teacher)," and two "My personal ability to act as a cooperating teacher, to guide and direct." Each of the following responses were listed only once as "biggest fears": "The student teacher will become my shadow for 6 1/2 hours a day," and the student teacher "will undercut my teaching style in promoting his or hers," "will not take my advice," "will lack initiative and have no personality," "will have an uncooperative attitude or rigid personality," "will use poor language and writing skills," "will be too much of an adolescent to deal with adolescents," and "will think he/she's the answer to education's problems."

When we consider issues important to secondary teachers from their perspectives and examine the tasks that they and their student

teachers face, we must not throw stones from our ivory towers. We must listen to their concerns and we must collaborate with them. When we validate and honor them, we validate and honor ourselves. For, indeed, we are all important figures on a hero's journey.

As Joseph Campbell says, when we follow the hero's path--to risk authentic expression like the "heroes of all time (the teachers) who have gone before us. . .we discover where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world (124)."

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